

Testimony at hearing - March 20, 2007 3 p.m.  
Montana Legislature House Agriculture Committee

My name is Gary Burnett, and I am from Potomac, Montana.

I moved from rural Illinois to Montana in 1977, drawn by the abundance of healthy land and friendly people. The Montana "brand" is appealing to a broader public, and has much opportunity to promote Montana as a good place to produce food that people will trust and buy.

Senate Bill No. 544 will establish a Montana-certified natural beef cattle program. This value added program for Montana's livestock industry has tremendous potential to deliver a product to consumers who are concerned about the way their food is grown. Certifying producers to raise high-quality, natural beef cattle that meets or exceeds the expectations of consumers will help develop the market for "Montana natural beef." As the program grows through state-sponsored support, the retail industry will benefit through an expanded natural beef program that will deliver a steady supply of natural food to their stores. Both of these expanded opportunities will add value for producers.

In addition, developing a natural beef program for cattle born, raised and eventually finished in Montana will help conserve one of Montana's most renewable resources – rangeland. This is a sustainable approach that brings the needs of local communities supported by the beef cattle industry together with conserving our natural resources.

A state-certified program will require the Department of Agriculture and Department of Livestock will establish two protocols – recordkeeping requirements for producers and certification procedures for the state. Determining the state, regional and national market for "Montana-certified natural beef" will be a good first step before aggressively promoting the brand. A handful of producers currently run "pasture to plate" beef programs, and some sell "natural feeder calves" to finish yards or other producers. The volume of demand for "Montana-certified natural beef" will determine how much investment is needed by the State of Montana to develop the market and create a stable and profitable program for producers. For a quick reference, go to [www.southdakotacertifiedbeef.com](http://www.southdakotacertifiedbeef.com) to see how the state-certified program is working in South Dakota.

As someone that wants my future grandchild to enjoy Montana as my wife and I do, we urge you to give this bill your support. We need all the strong and healthy businesses that use our natural resources wisely.

Thank you.